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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, JULY 2, 2008

In Today's Papers

New Detentions in The Ergenekon Investigation Rock Turkey
All news outlets report 21 suspects were detained yesterday on charges of membership to a terrorist organization, known as Ergenekon. The suspects include retired Generals Hursit Tolon and Sener Eruygur, Cumhuriyet daily's Ankara bureau chief Mustafa Balbay, and Ankara Chamber of Commerce President Sinan Aygun. In addition, warrants were issued for the arrests of former AKP lawmaker Turhan Comez and retired General Levent Ersoz. A total of seven were detained in Ankara, eleven in Istanbul, two in Antalya, two in Erzurum, and one in Trabzon. The Ergenekon investigation began eleven months ago, but an indictment has not been prepared yet. Islamist-oriented Zaman says the indictment is expected to be submitted before this weekend. Papers note the prosecutor might prepare an additional indictment, including the suspects taken into custody yesterday.

The Ergenekon network is alleged to be an underground organization comprised of retired military officers, journalists and opposition politicians who seek to overthrow the government. After hand grenades, TNT explosives and fuses were seized in a house in Istanbul's Umraniye district on June 12 last year, forty-five suspects were detained without being charged with any crime. Since then, suspects detained in relation to the case include retired general Veli Kucuk, leftist-nationalist Workers' Party leader Dogu Perincek, nationalist lawyer Kemal Kerincsiz, Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate spokesperson Sevgi Erenerol, former Istanbul University President Kemal Alemdaroglu, and Cumhuriyet chief editor Ilhan Selcuk.

Domestic Reactions to 'Ergenekon' Detentions
Prime Minister Erdogan told reporters Tuesday the government expects the case to be concluded "as soon as possible." In addition, Erdogan said, "Police executed the decision of the high criminal court. I think these detentions are a step forward to conclude the indictment." AKP deputy chair, Dengir Mir Mehmet Firat warned politicians to stay away from legal processes. "We should not be involved in the case as politicians; all should respect the judiciary's independence," Firat was quoted as saying. Main

opposition CHP slammed the detentions, and accused the government of "creating an empire of fear." CHP leader Deniz Baykal said Ergenekon was "a campaign to save Prime Minister Erdogan." Baykal said the detentions were "not likely to be seen in democracies," and "resembled the crackdowns of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Khomeini." The nationalist MHP's leader, Devlet Bahçeli, said the prosecutors should make a satisfactory explanation on the case. "The PM is moving forward on an inadvertent journey which will jeopardize democracy, Turkey's parliamentary regime, and his party," warned Bahçeli. The pro-Kurdish DTP acting chairwoman Emine Ayna criticized the operation, saying, "The AKP has been conducting this operation in line with its political program. Carrying out this operation on the same day as the verbal indictment is given in the closure case against the AKP has created legitimate question marks in the public opinion. It is impossible to think the choice of the date is a coincidence." Former AKP MP Turhan Comez, who is wanted for charges related to the operation, spoke from London to mainstream Vatan and called the operation "an attempt to set up an empire of fear." Yilmaz Ates, Deputy Leader of CHP, said Ergenekon "seems like a campaign against those who support national unity and the integration of this country as well as a democratic and secular republic. Unfortunately the main actors of this campaign are the government and its supporters. We will pursue this. I hope the indictment is announced as soon as possible." Zeki Sezer, Leader of the DSP, pointed out, "This operation took place as the chief prosecutor delivered his verbal arguments. The public's attention intentionally was averted. First the owner of Cumhuriyet daily was detained in a very nasty way. And now, Mr. Mustafa Balbay. Nobody will benefit from confronting the nation and the judiciary." Tayfun İcli, DSP Deputy, noted, "The investigation is not being held on

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June 29, but today, on a day when the top prosecutor of the Court of Appeals presents his arguments. They harm the principles of secularism and the social state. Only the principle of the rule of law remained and now they are harming this by attacking the judiciary and bringing society head to head with the judiciary. This is an unacceptable course of conduct."

Press Play of Ergenekon Detentions

In "The Great Intimidation," the leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet writes on its front page today the Ergenekon operation has transformed into an operation to "silence dissident voices," adding, "These events remind one of the September 1980 military coup period." Mainstream Hurriyet claims the "military General Staff (TGS) was informed about the detentions," because the TGS must be notified in order to enter the military lodgings where retired generals stay. Papers also note yesterday's round-up came after the recent meeting between PM Erdogan and Land Forces Commander General İlker Basbug meeting. In addition, in August the High Military Council (YAS) convention will decide on the appointments of the new commanders in the military.

Islamist-oriented media call the developments a lesson in accountability against those attempting to overthrow the government.

Mainstream media lash out against the arrests as targeting the opponents of the AKP in a "McCarthy-esque fashion." Liberal Radikal says the Ergenekon investigation "Finally Catches Some Big Fishes." Meanwhile, far right Tercuman, whose editor was detained in connection to the case yesterday, asks "Where Is Turkey Headed?" Mainstream Vatan points out that the arrests came while the chief prosecutor was charging the president, the prime minister and the ruling party with plotting to introduce an Islamic regime in Turkey.

Mainstream Aksam and Hurriyet report "the police were informed of the arrest warrants and a plan was devised on June 29," but Aksam speculates, "The actual arrests were delayed until Tuesday so they could overshadow the chief prosecutor's concluding arguments to close the AKP." Liberal Radikal notes, "There is a freedom of expression issue here. The journalists who were arrested were simply expressing their opinions."

İbrahim Karagül of Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak calls these developments, "a major and critical settling of scores." Mustafa Unal of Islamist-oriented Zaman notes, "Those who are planning coups should be held accountable because in democracies a coup is a major crime." Ergun Babahan of mainstream Sabah writes, "Turkey is headed

toward democracy and this is a lesson for future coup plotters." Tufan Turenc of mainstream Hurriyet writes, "This purge reminds one of the McCarthy era." Bilal Cetin of mainstream Vatan writes, "The majority of the public believe the operation was carried out in order to muzzle the opposition." Can Dundar of mainstream Milliyet writes, "In response to the closure case, some people were bullying those who exposed their dirty laundry," and "it's the judiciary that will suffer from this duel."

Editorial Commentary on Ergenekon Arrests and the AKP Closure Case

Ismet Berkan wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "These recent detentions look like the final phase of the ongoing Ergenekon investigation. It is very important that those who are involved in coup plots are brought to justice. If this case proves a link between those high level names and a plot to overthrow the government, for the first time in our modern democratic history, those responsible for planning a coup will be held accountable."

Haluk Sahin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "There is a freedom of expression issue here. There are writers and journalists among the detainees. These writers and journalists haven't done anything besides express their views, which were not liked by the government. Moreover, there is no evidence and no indictment in the Ergenekon case. However, something is clearly wrong: suspects have been kept in jail for a year without knowing what they are charged

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with."

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist-leaning Yeni Safak: "For the very first time in this country, high-level generals are facing charges due to their coup attempts. It is an important investigation in both its nature and its political consequences. Eventually we may or may not end up with a civilian political system."

Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet carried this op-ed from its editorial board: "What kind of investigation is this that has lasted over a year and is still collecting evidence? In the meantime, those opposed to the government are labeled and accused, but no actual charges are made. One wonders if the purpose is to conduct an investigation based on legal norms or to use the legal system to carry out the ruling party's agenda?"

Melih Asik wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The Ergenekon case seems like PM Erdogan's personal pursuit rather than a legal investigation. The way the arrests were carried out and the way journalists were treated cause serious suspicions about the real intentions of the investigation. The AKP government, with the support of the U.S. and the EU, is conducting its own coup against the nationalist forces in this country. Republicans, secularists, and Atatürkists, i.e. everybody supporting the secular republic, is now an open target of the AKP."

Fikret Bila wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The Ergenekon investigation has lasted for more than a year. Given the broader focus, one wonders if there is an attempt here to create a link between different events and to present them as if they are all connected. The general outlook looks like more of a settling of scores which can bring some very serious consequences in the end."

Chief Prosecutor Presents his Verbal Statement

All papers report that Court of Appeals Chief Prosecutor Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya completed his closing arguments in favor of closing the AKP in Ankara yesterday. The statement lasted for one and a half hours. Yalcinkaya said that "AKP wanted to bring Sharia to Turkey, which poses a clear and present danger. Therefore, the party must be closed down." Yalcinkaya stated that the AKP's proposed turban amendments to the Constitution strengthened the arguments against the AKP. The Chief Prosecutor also made reference to AKP Vice Chairman Dengir Mir Firat's recent remarks when he called Atatürk's reforms "traumatic" for Turkish society. Yalcinkaya also noted that PM Erdogan supported Yasin Al-Kadi, whose name is on the UN's list of those who support global terrorism, which Yalcinkaya argued shows that the AKP has an inclination towards violence.

Cypriot Leaders Agree on Single Sovereignty and Single Citizenship
Mainstream Sabah and liberal Radikal report that Greek Cypriot leader Dimitris Chrstofias and Turkish Cypriot Leader Mehmet Ali Talat met yesterday in order to invigorate the peace negotiations on the island. Both leaders agreed in principal that any solution should be based on single sovereignty and single citizenship. Further details will emerge during future negotiations.

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- On Tuesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arrived in Ankara to meet Foreign Minister Ali Babacan on Wednesday. The two ministers will hold a joint press conference after their meeting. Lavrov will also meet with President Abdullah Gul.

- Prime Minister Erdogan will travel to Malaysia on July 7-8 to participate in the Developing-8 (D-8) Islamic countries meeting.

- Suleyman Celebi, the head of the left-leaning labor union DISK,

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was acquitted in the lawsuit for provoking illegal demonstrations with his calls urging workers to gather in Istanbul's Taksim Square for May Day celebrations.

International News

- French President Nicolas Sarkozy is to meet Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Paris on July 12.

- Former Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer has confirmed he will quit domestic politics and take up the roll of UN special envoy for Cyprus.

- Armenian President Sarkisian has invited Turkish President Abdullah Gul to watch the September 6 soccer game between the Armenian and Turkish national teams in Yerevan.

WILSON